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‘LOB DER EMIGRATION’: ALBIN STUEBS

Using a variety of archival materials and other, hitherto inaccessible sources, this chapter presents an account of the life and work of Albin Stuebs (1900-77). Stuebs was on the threshold of a promising literary career when, because of his communist convictions, he was forced into exile in 1933, first in Czechoslovakia and then in England. In Prague he published in *Neue Deutsche Blätter*, *Die neue Weltbühne*, *Der Gegen-Angriff* and other leading exile journals, but gradually grew disillusioned with communism. After escaping to England in late 1938, Stuebs spent eighteen months in internment in Australia (1940-41). After his release he worked for the BBC, broadcasting a series of programmes aimed at workers in Germany. In 1947 he returned to Germany where he worked for NWDR/NDR in Hamburg until 1963. His novels *Romantisches Vorspiel* (1946) and *Der wahre Jakob* (1949), as well as plays such as *Wir armen deutschen Brüder* (1948) never achieved the literary prominence in post-war Germany for which he had hoped.

Albin Stuebs (1900-77) was a writer of some promise when he was forced into exile in 1933. Today, however, his name is almost entirely unknown except among specialists on German exile literature. None of his works has been in print since the shanties which he translated from the English were published in 1958. Like so many of his generation, he had been active in the youth movement, then felt the attraction of left-wing ideas, and was on the threshold of a literary career when Hitler came to power. Condemned to obscurity during the Nazi era, he then found it impossible to achieve a literary breakthrough in post-war Germany. As a lapsed communist he was *persona non grata* in the GDR, where his record of left-wing writing in the Weimar Republic and in exile was assiduously ignored, as Alfred Kantorowicz notes in his critique of Klaus Jarmatz’s study *Literatur im Exil* (Berlin 1966):


1
In the Federal Republic, too, he was one of the many victims of the widespread reluctance to engage with the experience and the creative work of anti-fascist exiles which is characteristic of the country’s early years. Yet precisely for these reasons a study of his life and work can offer valuable insights into the disruptions and disconnections of German literary life in 1933-45 and the problematic attempts of exiles to return to Germany in the post-war era. The purpose of this chapter is to reconstruct the main events of Stuebs’s life and to offer a necessarily brief overview of his most important literary works while leaving a more detailed analysis for another study.

Albert Gustav Robert Stuebs (Albin was the pseudonym he adopted as a writer) was born on 20 February 1900 into a working-class family in the Wedding district of Berlin. He attended Volksschule there until the age of 14 when he became an apprentice engraver and, according to his son Nicolas, harboured the ambition to become a goldsmith: ‘Ich lernte hier die Bedienung von kleinen Hobel- und Fräsmaschinen mit Fussantrieb.’

He broke off his apprenticeship in May 1915 to join his father in the Tobler factory working on the production of military vehicles for service in the war. In September 1916 he was employed for a month in another factory (as an ‘Einrichter von Stanzen, die besonders von Frauen bedient wurden’) before first returning to Tobler and then moving to the Deutsche Werke in Wittenau where he remained until September or October 1917. For about three months he then worked on grinding machines at the Bergmannsche Elektrizitätswerke in Berlin, followed by a short period as, first, an office worker and, subsequently, as a fitter in yet another factory. He was called up for the last three months of the Great War before returning to another round of short-term jobs as fitter, agricultural worker, mill worker, office worker, and builder.

There is nothing in this outline of Stuebs’s early years to suggest a future career as a writer. Yet the biographical details provided by Wieland Herzfelde in 1934 (and attributable almost certainly to information given by Stuebs himself) indicate that his literary work can be dated from 1917 and that the primary influence on this work until 1925 was the Youth Movement or what Herzfelde, as a Marxist, dismisses as ‘Jugendromantik’. It is known that Stuebs spent about six months, from 25 September 1919 until 7 March 1920, living and working as a member of a utopian community, the Freideutsche Siedlung Höhbeck in Pevestorf near Lenze on the Elbe, and